#### Historical Context

Have you ever signed an autograph album or a school year book?
Signatures can be important because they remind us of special people, places or events. Album or Signature quilts were a nineteenth century fad in America from 1840 to

the 1890s that were like an autograph album. Album quilts were often made to mark a special event or as a gift to someone who was moving away. As the name suggests, these quilts used the signatures of people as part of the design. Sometimes poems, bible verses or dedications were also added. By 1840 a new indelible ink (didn't wash out) made it easier for people to sign their name on fabric that was then sewn into a quilt. Signing your name on cloth can be hard so you may notice that in some quilts one person with beautiful handwriting signed all of the names. Album quilts were such cherished mementos that they were well cared for and rarely used. This is why we have many examples of these quilts in good condition today.

# ALBUM QUILTS



FIGURE 1: Album, Georgia S. Ingalls and Phoebe Sanderson

# Design Elements

Album or Signature quilts use blocks of fabric that are sewn together to make a large quilt. The two most common styles were appliqué and pieced.

- Appliqué, the technique, of stitching one fabric onto another, was very popular. Many appliqué patterns started in the 1840-'50s with the album quilt trend.
- Pieced album quilts were made up of blocks of the same pattern using different fabrics. The center space in each block is where it was signed.
   Sometimes the blocks used in the quilt were made with scraps of clothing from the person creating the block.

# Artists and Origin

The beautiful Album/Roman Cross quilt (See Figure 1) was made by Georgia Ingalls and Phoebe Sanderson. The quilt with signature blocks involved two generations of the family and was created through a custom that may no longer seem "romantically correct."

In one small Wisconsin community it was a local custom for girls to sew quilt blocks from the scrap material of their new dresses. These blocks were given to boys that they liked. When a boy married, these blocks were supposed to be sewn together by his wife. Around 1877 Georgia married Joshua Ingalls, who was so popular that he had enough blocks for two quilts. The first quilt made by Georgia was "used up", which is what happened to most quilts. But Georgia had accidentally spilled ink on the other signature blocks. These were sewn into a quilt top and put away in a trunk. Years later, after World War I, Phoebe Sanderson cared for Georgia, who was ill. Phoebe replaced the ink-stained blocks and finished the quilt top using

material that had been commercially reproduced to match the "old time" style. In the 1950s it was quilted by a group of church women.



FIGURE 1A: Close-up of album quilt

# Compare and Contrast

Another quilt in the exhibit, *Quilts of Alaska: A Textile Album of the Last Frontier,* is an example created by twenty-one ladies in Sitka for Judge Lafayette Dawson when he left Sitka. Each lady signed or initialed the crazy block that she created for the finished quilt.

How are the two quilts alike?
How are the two quilts different?
Which quilt do you like better? Why?

Possible answers: 1. Names of people, each person made a block that was put into the finished quilt; women created the blocks, etc. 2. The album quilt was assembled years later by different people; made in different places, Sitka and Wisconsin; fancy versus more plain fabrics; etc. 3. Answers will be personal reflections



Figure 2: Crazy dated and inscribed.

# Hands Across the Americas: The Ann Miletich Project

Humanitarian artist Ann Miletich held three quilting workshops at the Alaska State Museum in November 1999 for local youth in Juneau, Alaska. The youth learned about Bolivian culture, discussed the importance of sharing and created a quilt block during the workshop. Adult quilters from Juneau volunteered to assemble the youth-created blocks into baby quilts. Two months later the quilts were completed and ready to be shipped to Bolivan orphanages. A joyous reception for the student artists and community quilters was held at the Alaska State Museum on January 29, 2000.

Project statistics at a glance:

- Six Southeast Alaskan communities and 107 adult quilters helped produce 111 quilts for Bolivian orphans.
- Over 300 kids from throughout SE Alaska participated.
- Three workshops for local youth, funded in part by the City and Borough of Juneau sales tax receipts, were held at the Alaska State Museum.

The objectives for students in "Hands Across the Americas" were to:

- analyze the techniques, craftsmanship, and meaning of contemporary and historical fiber art pieces;
- explore similarities and differences in the arts of world cultures;
- recognize the rewards of helping others less fortunate and become sensitive to their needs:
- explore the visual art technique of drawing on fabric;
- collaborate with others to create works of art and understand the value of community involvement;
- discuss the significance of art and beauty in human life; and
- understand ones own potential to make a difference in the world.

Quilters of all ages enjoyed the finished quilts on display at the Alaska State Museum before they were sent to Bolivia.



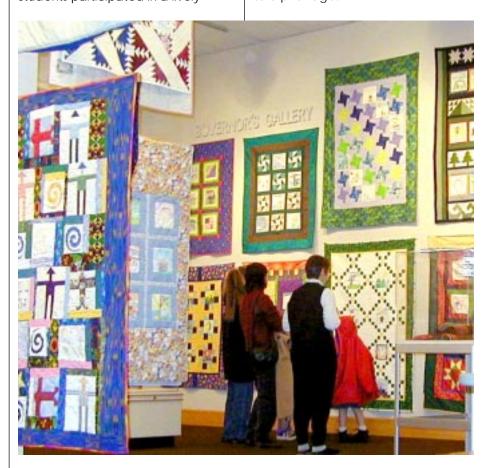
Ann Miletich helps student prepare quilt block.

Using a temporary exhibit at the Alaska State Museum, "Earth, Fire and Fiber," as an inspiration, artist Ann Miletich introduced the students to the idea of textile as art. She used slides, stories and actual clothing from Bolivia (that children could touch) to illustrate and contrast the Bolivian and American cultures. Students participated in a lively

discussion and demonstrated their understanding through completed fabric squares that they created for quilts.

The excitement about sharing with another culture reached a crescendo on Saturday, January 29, 2000 at the Governor's Gallery at the State Museum. 107 volunteer quilters creatively assembled the children's fabric squares into 111 magnificent baby quilts. The Museum gallery was festooned in color from floor to ceiling. An Executive Proclamation by Governor Tony

Knowles was read. Excited young artists, adult quilters and their admiring audience spent hours examining and photographing the display. The quilt display was extremely popular with hundreds of museum-visitors throughout the month of February. The quilts were then lovingly taken down and carefully packed to be air freighted to Bolivia where artist Ann Miletich distributed them personally to orphanages.



# REMEMBER ME

# Can quilts help us remember?

Level: Intermediate (grades 3-5) and Middle School (grades 6-8)

#### Part 1

- Look at the pictures of the two quilts from the *Quilts of Alaska* exhibit, Crazy (FIGURE 2) and Album/Roman Cross (FIGURE 1). Read the basic information about Album/Signature quilts.
- Discuss what events people commemorate with an album quilt. (weddings, anniversaries, special birthdays, graduation, someone moving, etc.) Discuss why a quilt was a good gift to a departing friend.
- Select a reason to create an Album quilt (such as a special school event). Read about *Hands Across America* youth quilt project and consider making a classroom quilt for a good cause.
- Discuss how much time this activity might take (paper and glue in one hour; or fabric, sewing and real quilting in 3-6 hours)
- Create a rubric or scoring guide for how the class will judge the final quilt and the criteria for satisfactory completion. (See sample rubric for ideas.)

#### Part 2

- Each student first designs a 6 x 6-inch paper square (finished fabric size will be 5 1/2" squares) that personally reflects a message about themselves that they want to contribute to the quilt. Have a partner check for spelling, overall impact, color balance, size of letters, design, etc. Consult the rubric or scoring guide. Make final corrections.
- Create the actual square for the quilt on either fabric, using fabric markers, or on good drawing paper (if a paper quilt is being created). Tape fabric squares on cardboard for easier work. Use masking tape to cover 1/4" on each edge (to allow for sewing squares).
- As individual squares are completed, lay them together (or pin on bulletin board) and discuss best placement.
   Consider color balance, design, overall impact, etc.
   Consult the rubric or scoring guide.
- When a final arrangement is determined, sew the pieces together with a sewing machine or glue them onto a large piece of paper. If using fabric, consider using a patterned fabric or seam binding to separate the squares.

#### Part 3

- Use the rubric or scoring guide you created to evaluate the finished quilt. Dicuss the details of the rubric.
- Display the class quilt in a public place for others to see. Make an exhibit label, like the ones used in museums, to go alongside the quilt.

#### Summary

Students create a quilt for a special event. Each student designs a 6 x 6-inch quilt square that shares something about him/herself using fabric markers or indelible inks. Individual squares are then sewn together into an album quilt.

Alternative: Create a paper album quilt.

#### **Estimated Time**

Fabric quilt, depending on hand or machine sewing, 180 - 360 minutes. Paper quilt, approximately 60 minutes.

#### **Variations**

- Make the squares smaller or larger depending on finished size and time you have for the activity.
- Have students role-play an historical event by assuming an historical personality for that event and use their square to infer what that person might say about the event (i.e. American Revolution – Paul Revere and a reference to his ride).

#### Assessments

Student self-reflection about the project. Use the following prompts as either written or oral examples.

Example: "In this lesson we looked at historical album quilts and created one of our own. We created and used a scoring guide to critique or judge our quilt."

Answer the following questions:

- What did we learn from these activities?
- Did we meet or exceed the standards that we focused on during this activity?
- What makes you think so?
- What did you learn most during this activity?
- What might you have done differently to improve your square?
- What did you learn about quilts by doing this activity?

#### Alaska Content Standards

In this activity students will focus on the following: FINE ARTS

- A.1 participate in the visual arts
- A.2 refine artistic skill and develop self-discipline through practice and revision
- C.1 know the criteria to evaluate the arts
- C.2 examine historical works of art and describe the basic elements, interpret meaning and artist's intent
- D.6 recognize that people connect many aspects of life through the arts.

#### **Materials**

- Plain paper for design, 6" x 6" square per student
- White or light colored fabric or paper, 6" x 6" square per student
- Fabric markers (thin) or other marker/pen that will print on fabric and not wash out
- Cardboard (at least 8" x 8")
- · Masking tape, to share
- Sewing machines or needles & thread to hand sew the fabric squares together
- Large piece of fabric or paper to back the finished guilt

Optional for fabric quilt: seam binding or colored fabric for borders, batting or filling

We highly recommend Quilts of Alaska: A Textile Album of the Last Frontier for schools and teachers who plan to use the exhibit or materials from the exhibit in their classrooms. The catalog is extravagantly illustrated with full color pictures of selected quilts and historic photographs. Five chapters provide detailed information about quilting as it applies to Alaska. A full index, appendix, bibliography and endnotes make it a valuable resource for reference and teaching. Ordering information: The Store at the Alaska State Museum, 395 Whittier St., Juneau, Alaska 99801. \$21.95 +\$7. (postage /handling) per book.

Hall, June, Guest Curator. Quilts of Alaska: A Textile Album of the Last Frontier. Gastineau Channel Historical Society, 2001 ISBN: 0-9704815-0-0

#### Vocabulary

**Binding** — One of a number of techniques for encasing the raw edges of a quilt. "Binding" also refers to a separate strip of fabric used to bind the edges of a quilt.

Quilt — A textile bedcover typically formed of three layers: a decorated top, a plain backing, and a fluffy filling between them. The layers of a quilt are usually sewn together with stitches through all the layers; alternatively, they may be tied or "tacked" together with yarn knots.

**Quilting** — Specifically, a needlework process in which layers of a quilt are attached to each other with continuous stitches, either by hand or with a sewing machine. More generally, the term refers to the entire process of making a quilt.

# Sample Rubric or Scoring Guide for a "Remember Me" Quilt

Criteria	Does Not Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Purpose and Intent	Some squares do not belong in this quilt, don't match the purpose, or don't make sense here	Most squares help explain the main purpose and meaning for our quilt.	Each square is important and helps make the whole quilt more meaningful.
Personal Expression	Some squares are unsigned or don't have any personal images in them.	Most squares reflect the ideas or thoughts of the person who made it; name or initials are on the square	Every square is unique and reflects the person who made the square
Basic Elements and Design	Some squares are the wrong size, cannot be read, or are boring. Pattern is haphazard and unbalanced	The paper or fabric is uniform, words and images are clear; squares are straight and well-glued or sewn. The design is balanced	All of the quilt pieces fit together so well that if one were missing the quilt would not be as pleasing. Design is striking and makes the viewer look more closely.